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## Rural Protective Association, Inc., Papers (1970-1973) : A Collection Guide

Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. Special Collections and University Archives.

James Anthony Schnur

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**Rural Protective Association, Inc.,  
Papers (1970-1973)**

*A Collection Guide by*  
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## **Introduction to the Collection**

Margaret Horst, a resident of Tarpon Springs, gave this collection to James A. Schnur in 1997. Horst had served as secretary of the Rural Protective Association at the time of its creation in 1970. Schnur, then assistant director at the Tarpon Springs Public Library, donated the materials to the Poynter Library so that the notebook and various records would reside in a location that would ensure their long-term preservation.

## **Background Information about the Rural Protective Association**

This collection documents how residents of a sparsely developed area fought a last ditch—and ultimately unsuccessful—battle to preserve their rural lifestyle in the frontier range of northeastern Pinellas County. Many of them gathered at Al Boyd's Boot Ranch, a large agricultural ranch once noted for its prize cattle and horses with a seventeen-foot high boot by its entrance. As developers carved new suburbs east of Lake Tarpon, many of the pasturelands disappeared. In 1970, locals worried that plans to develop an airport on a fifty-acre tract one mile east of East Lake Road and one-quarter mile south of Keystone Road would disrupt cattle and dairy production in the region. They came together and established the Rural Protective Association as a non-profit organization to oppose the airport and prevent suburban encroachment.

Alfred "Al" Boyd (1913-1998), a north Pinellas native and member of a pioneer family, led this effort. His grandparents, Eugene Boyd and wife Nancy Blanton Boyd, originally came to the area from Greenville, Florida, in the mid-1880s. They had traveled by wagon along trails through San Antonio towards Green Springs, now Safety Harbor. With the arrival of the Orange Belt Railway in 1888, the Boyd family witnessed the dramatic growth of Tarpon Springs and John Cheyney's development of lands east of Tarpon Springs as part of the Lake Butler Villa Company. In 1913, Al Boyd was born in the Safety Harbor area.

The Boyd family had established an impressive ranch and cultivated acreage in northeastern Pinellas. In 1951—two years after the Florida Legislature ended the open range with the "Closed Fence Law"—Al Boyd established Boot Ranch south of Lake Tarpon (formerly Lake Butler) near Tampa Road. That same year, the large boot was placed on the property. The ranch thrived in rural northeastern Pinellas at the same time that Clearwater became one of the fastest growing municipalities in the United States and development embraced the rest of the county. As subdivisions sprouted to the southwest, Boyd even offered some of his land as right-of-way for East Lake Road, a move that opened the area north of Oldsmar and east of Lake Tarpon to new settlers.

By the spring of 1970, rural residents who lived around Boot Ranch expressed concern about plans to construct an airport on lands in the East Lake area. Boyd and others held informal meetings in June 1970 and filed organizational paperwork with the Florida Department of State on June 25 to establish the Rural Protective Association. The first formal meeting after incorporation took place at the Boot Ranch, on County Road 77, on 31 August 1970. Many members expressed anger when they heard that leaders in the Tarpon Springs Chamber of Commerce supported the airpark proposal. Residents mounted a petition drive and contacted members of the Board of County Commissioners. In addition to its preservation efforts, the Rural Protection Association also sponsored social activities such as "new neighbor barbecues."

Despite their lobbying efforts, members of the Rural Protective Association could not halt the wave of development that spilled along the eastern shores of Lake Tarpon. Al Boyd sold Boot Ranch “on a handshake” to a land development company in 1972 and the Boyd family’s landholdings shrunk to under 500 acres by the late 1980s. Developers transformed tracts formerly owned by Boyd into the East Lake Woodlands, Lansbrook, and Boot Ranch subdivisions. Members of the Rural Protective Association dissolved the non-profit by proclamation on 2 July 1973.

For many years, a small north-south landing strip known as Tarpon Air Park sat at the end of Airpark Road (now Fletch Haven Drive), south of Keystone Road. In an ironic twist, as condominiums and large homes approached the site of the landing strip, Pinellas County authorities acquired the site in September 1996 for \$279,900 (the tract was purchased by its previous owners for \$20,000 in 1971). Thus, while little remained of the rural character once found along Tampa Road and much of the East Lake area, the runaway and much of the site of the former airpark have returned to their natural state. Even the famous boot has moved to a new spot where it is now surrounded by asphalt in a Shoppes of Boot Ranch parking lot.

### **Preservation Note**

The materials in this collection occupy four acid-free folders. While preservation measures may slow the physical deterioration of this collection, these steps cannot prevent damage from occurring. To prevent further damage to the fragile materials in this collection, avoid exposing them to light for an extended period of time. Please report any damage so that library staff may take appropriate preservation or conservation measures. No restrictions limit access to this collection.

### **Provenance of the Rural Protective Association Papers**

This collection falls under the Local and Regional History provenance of the Special Collections and Archives department, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, USF St. Petersburg.

### **Scope and Contents**

The contents occupy four folders (approximately 0.15 linear foot).

### **Additional Source of Information**

Researchers interested in the agricultural history of northeastern Pinellas County and the development of Boot Ranch should consult:

Olds, Arthur F. *It’s No Bull! The True Story of The Taming of Northeast Pinellas County*.  
New Port Richey: Boot Ranch Publishing, 1992.

The Tarpon Springs Public Library (138 East Lemon Street, Tarpon Springs) owns select microfilm copies of the *Tarpon Springs Leader*, including issues from the late 1960s and early 1970s.

# Container Listing

## Folder 1: Organizational Records

Includes minutes of the first meeting of the members during incorporation, documents establishing an account at the First National Bank in Tarpon Springs, and other administrative documents.

## Folder 2: Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes outlining activities of the organization. The spiral notebook also includes handwritten notes about plans by developers to open the airpark, as well as names and telephone numbers of leaders in the Rural Protective Association.

## Folder 3: Clippings and Correspondence

The bulk of materials illustrates the airpark controversy during 1970. Also included are later materials from the 1990s documenting development in the Boot Ranch area and the death of Al Boyd.

## Folder 4: Membership Lists and Petitions

Most materials are from 1970.



Site of the former landing strip of Tarpon Air Park (north-south orientation) on the left side of the photograph. This image, taken in 2002, indicates that the original airstrip has nearly disappeared. The parking lot and buildings at the lower left corner are used by Pinellas County Government.